

Socialist Worker

End Labour's control of our Trade Unions!

PROTESTS CAN DEFEAT THE PROPERTY TAX!

RESISTANCE is growing to austerity in Ireland. Everywhere the cry is heard 'Enough is Enough'. So now is the time to step up the pressure on the government to defeat the property tax.

Broadly, there are three fronts where resistance is breaking out.

Property tax

A large network of anti-property tax groups has been formed and they are bringing substantial numbers into public meetings.

April 13 is only the start of the movement to beat the tax. It will be followed up by a day of civil disobedience on 1 May and there should then be further mass mobilisations throughout May and June.

Despite all the government spin, a Sunday Business Post survey has indicated that one third of people will not register for the tax. Many of these will fail to do so because they simply cannot pay. If you cannot meet your mortgage payments or put enough food on the table, the last thing you will pay is the property tax.

The unions

Over a year ago, SIPTU leader Jack O'Connor boasted that the original Croke Park deal had 'taken the unions out of the equation of protest'.

O'Connor is the Labour Party's most active agent inside the trade union movement.

He occasionally uses left wing rhetoric to denounce austerity, but he spends all his time spreading defeatism to ensure there is no active protest movement.

Now the first signs are emerging that Labour's control of the unions is being challenged. A number of unions have stated that they will not be bound by the terms of the Croke Park 2 proposals – even if the ICTU vote for it. This is absolutely correct because the ICTU is effectively run by the leaders of SIPTU and IMPACT – who are a disgrace to the very name of trade unionism. If they had their way, they would vote through wage cuts and longer hours for other workers.

Croke Park 2 represents a turning point for the unions. It shows the depth to which some union leaders will sink – but it also shows they now face increasing resistance.

The collapse of Labour

The third front of resistance is the growing disgust with the Labour Party itself. Their tiny vote in Meath East and the defection of Nessa Childers shows that they are in serious trouble.

The pressure on this party needs to



**BUILDING
A REAL
ALTERNATIVE**
People Before Profit Conference
Sunday 21 April 10:30 in Wynn's Hotel, Dublin
Speakers include Richard Boyd Barrett TD and Eamonn McCann



increase further. People like Childers should be commended for leaving the parliamentary party – but she and others should break from Labour completely.

In unions such as SIPTU – which pays a political levy to the Labour Party – forms should be circulated to leave the political fund, until a commitment is given that

not a penny goes to the Labour Party.

These three fronts of resistance show that change is coming.

But it would be wrong to send out a message to 'wait until the local elections to take our revenge'.

The fight has begun and is bound to escalate. By January next year, for example,

people will have to pay the full property charge and water charges on top of that.

We need to spread the struggle rapidly across all three fronts. This means

1. We need a big day of civil disobedience on 1 May.
2. We need a grassroots movement in our unions to rid us of leaders who

continually sell out.

3. We need a real political alternative to Labour. The People Before Profit Alliance represents one significant strand of that alternative. It will hold an open conference on 21 April in Wynn's Hotel Dublin from 10.30am to 4.30pm.

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What Socialists Say



The death of Thatcher

The death of Margaret Thatcher is mourned by Conservatives, neo-liberals and right wingers the world over.

The reaction of working people, trade unionists and socialists is the complete opposite - no British politician in living memory was so roundly hated by working people.

This divided response reflects almost exactly the class division in society for Thatcher was the embodiment of a vicious class warrior.

On our side she will be remembered first and foremost as the devastator of working class communities, the bringer of mass unemployment and enemy of the welfare state, the scourge of the unions and the victor over the miners in the most important strike in post-war British history.

In Ireland she will doubtless be recalled as the callous imperialist who stone-heartedly let Bobby Sands and his fellow hunger strikers die on the absurd basis that they were common criminals not political opponents.

Internationally she was a warmonger and the ally of reactionaries and oppressors everywhere. She cold bloodedly sank the Belgrano to make the Falklands War inevitable and rejoiced over the sacrifice of young Argentinian and British lives in a pointless war. Friend of Ronald Reagan and General Pinochet, the Chilean torturer, she was the enemy of Nelson Mandela.

Attempts are made to justify her on the grounds that she was the first woman to be British PM and was a champion of 'freedom'. These claims are false. She hated feminism, did nothing for working class women or to increase women's role in politics and only championed the 'freedom' of the markets to trample on ordinary people. She will not be missed.

Privatising training

JOAN Burton has discovered a new language for dealing with the unemployed. Inspired by the IMF and the EU Commission, her new buzz word is 'labour activation'.

If this had anything to do with creating real jobs, it would be welcomed. But Burton's aim is to pressurise the unemployed into poorly paid work and to put them through short courses to get them ready for this.

The older scandal ridden training agency, FAS, has been replaced with a new agency known as SOLAS. But instead of directly offering training courses, SOLAS will oversee the creation of new Education and Training Boards.

These will invite tenders to provide training courses and private companies will be asked to apply.

Private training companies will try to undercut state agencies like the VEC by hiring teachers on lower wages and worse conditions.

They will also try to meet certain artificial educational 'outputs' as a way of winning more tenders for the future.

Despite Labour's talk of protecting its supporters against Fine Gael, this is exactly the strategy pursued by Thatcher in Britain.

Her aim was to use the unemployment crisis of the 1980's to create new opportunities for profit making. Now Burton is following her down the same privatisation road.

Property Tax Analysis

MAY 1:

A Day of Civil Disobedience

By KIERAN ALLEN



THE government is trying to use fear and intimidation to drive through a property tax because they have no real argument to justify it.

The Fine Gael party ran in the last election on a manifesto which stated that they were 'opposed to a recurring tax on the family home'.

The Labour Party said they wanted a 'site value tax, which would be based on land value.'

So neither has a democratic mandate to introduce this tax.

The property tax is based on 'market valuation' which means that the tax on a smaller house in Dublin will be higher than on a mansion in Mayo. Moreover, the tax is only levied on the first acre of a property and not the rest.

This is particularly beneficial to wealthy individuals like the Health Minister, James Reilly, who owns the 12 bedroom Laughton House, situated on 150 acres of Offaly soil.

He will be charged a property tax on just one of those acres while the other 149 will be exempt.

When this was pointed out to the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, he replied: "The deputy is entitled, given that Ireland is a country in which there is plenty of land, to have space outside his house to stand back and see if it is painted properly."

At the other end of the scale there are vast numbers of people who are in real mortgage distress.

They are already terrified when they hear politicians set down criteria for what lifestyles they will be permitted if they seek some debt relief through the Personal Insolvency legislation.

Now they are being asked to pay again when hundreds of thousands can't keep their heads above water as it is. These people simply have no idea how they can pay a property tax when they cannot even pay the full mortgage.

Local Authority Tenants

The hollowness of the government's argument is further evident in the decision to tax 125,000 local authority tenants. Local authority tenants do not own property yet the government is making them subject to a 'property' tax.

This shows that the primary purpose is not taxing an asset which can be traded to accumulate wealth. The aim is to levy the majority of the population - rather than the tiny financial



elite who caused the economic crisis

Government Lies

The government is telling two main lies to try to get the property tax through.

Lie No 1: The property tax will be used to fund local authorities. It will lead to better local democracy.

The government has cut the funding for local authorities over the past few years - so no extra money will be made available through this tax.

Local government receives two types of grants from central authorities to fund its operations - a general purpose grant and other grants and subsidies.

The table below shows how both have been cut by €522 million - which is almost exactly what the property tax is designed to raise.

Lie No 2: The property tax is necessary to widen the tax base and ensure that Ireland's debt is paid off.

One of the main reasons why Ireland's debt is so high is because the country was forced to pay off bankers.

This debt should be written down to pre-crisis levels. If a

left wing government emerged, they would unilaterally do this.

There are also many other ways of raising revenue besides hitting the majority of people. Here are some:

There should be a 5 percent wealth tax on all assets in excess of €1 million. This will necessitate the establishment of a comprehensive wealth and assets register.

There should be an increase in corporation profits taxes so that all companies pay a minimum effective tax of 12.5% initially and further increases where necessary.

There should be a mandatory employer contribution to pension funds and an increase in their social security payments.

There should be a Robin Hood tax on all financial speculation.

There should be a third rate of tax on incomes over €100,000 to reduce the Universal Social Charge for those on lower incomes.

Resist

The property tax can be beaten if we stick together and take strong determined action. Here are the main things we need to do

■ Do not return the self assess-

ment form. The government need you to comply with this tax because they still do not have enough data on homeownership. Once you fill in that form, you will be liable to pay tax for the rest of your life.

■ Make 1 May a day of civil disobedience. Hold a democratic assembly in each area and take a vote on what form of peaceful, mass civil disobedience your area wishes to engage in. It could mean blocking roads, occupying government offices and banks or staging other protests.

■ Get your union to oppose this tax and defend workers if it is taken out of pay packets.

■ The government has introduced a law to give full details of every worker's personal circumstances to their employers to allow them to forcibly take the tax from pay packets. This is entirely unacceptable. Demand that your union resist this by taking up a petition in your workplace now.

Ireland is entering a new phase of resistance as people shout 'Enough is enough'. Now is the time to move from giving out on Joe Duffy - to serious, concerted action on the streets and in the workplaces.

Central Government Grants to Local Authorities 2008-2012

Year	General Purpose Grant (€m)	Government Grants and Subsidies (€m)	Total (€m)
2008	1,000	1,192	2,192
2009	937	1,255	2,192
2010	773	1,105	1,878
2011	705	1,129	1,834
2012	651	959	1,670



TUI militants show the way

By BRIAN O'BOYLE
(TUI Branch Chair, St Angela's College)

THE TUI held their annual conference in Galway last week. Around 400 delegates amassed in the Clayton Hotel and before a word had even been spoken it was clear that this would be a conference to remember.

TUI is the first union in the country to give its verdict on Croke Park 2 and the message going back is loud and clear – Enough is Enough.

A whopping 86% voted to reject the proposals and a number of key emergency motions ensured that the executive has no wriggle room to get back into talks.

On the opening morning, Eddie Conlon from the Dublin Colleges branch moved a motion to "instruct the executive not to enter any further Croke Park negotiations" and to "reject any imposition of the proposals by the government or the ICTU".

It also called on the executive to "work with all other unions who reject CP2 with the aim of preventing its implementation".

On each of these issues the executive pleaded with members not to tie their hands but to no avail.

Over 60% of delegates passed the motion and more was to come.

A whole series of motions on the second day were passed with the intent of

firming up the unions' response to an attack by government.

In particular, members voted to withdraw from CPI, direct all members to refuse to implement CP2 and to ballot for strike action if and when the government seek to impose its proposals.

There were also motions calling on ICTU to demand extra taxation from the top 5% of 'income units' rather than seeking to consistently attack the public services. Again the executive spoke against these proposals – again they lost resoundingly.

Alongside these general motions there were important salvos fired against the

erosion of terms and conditions.

A joint emergency motion by a number of Institutes of Technology ordered the executive to organise a ballot and to issue a directive to all third level members banning the setting and marking of exam scripts should these proposal be accepted by the Public Services committee of ICTU.

This is concrete direction and may well pave the way for a ratcheting up of the teacher's resistance.

Finally there were a number of extremely important political motions that were passed almost unanimously.

Jim Roach from the Irish Anti-War Movement got an excellent motion passed

which 'demands that ICTU' step up its campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions against the apartheid state of Israel until it lifts its alleged siege of Gaza'.

Meanwhile Dundalk IT got through a crucial motion that "specifically opposes the new property tax and instructs the TUI to campaign against it".

These two motions in particular show the levels of politicisation that are now occurring alongside the growing anger with the government's addiction to austerity.

The government has warned that it will cut pay unilaterally if they fail to get agreement – the message from the TUI conference is bring it on.

Teachers see 'red' at INTO conference

By NIAL SMYTH
(Secretary, District XIV Personal Capacity)

THERE was an angry defiant mood at this year's INTO conference held over Easter in Cork City. It was very clear that in spite of having a packed agenda the impending vote on Croke Park 2 was uppermost in people's minds.

Just before conference kicked off delegates from 6 Districts and over 15 branches met to discuss emergency motions on the issue.

RTE had reported that of the three teacher unions the INTO would not be discussing CP2 as no motion on the matter appeared on the agenda.

The TUI was dedicating most of their conference to discussing the deal and a sizeable proportion of the ASTI agenda was taken over by talk of the deal – yet it appeared that if the leadership had its way there was to be little debate on the topic.

From the off there was a huge battle to have even a discussion on the deal as the leadership manipulated rules and hid behind bureaucracy.

The mantra of the leadership was that they didn't want to see any discussion happen that might "interfere with the democratic process" as the ballot process had already begun among INTO members.

That said, it didn't seem to worry some executive members who made it clear which way they thought people should vote and resorted to wild hysteria about "prolonged strikes" (strike has almost become a dirty word) in an attempt to push a yes vote.

In fact the only planned discussion of the deal was to be an address in private session by the General Secretary, Sheila Numan, followed by Questions and Answers on the



first night.

Despite the executive the majority of speakers opposed the deal.

Only 2 delegates and 3 executive members spoke in favour, whilst it was very clear from the reaction among the 800 or so delegates that the majority were opposed to the deal.

Day two saw the Minister for education Ruairi Quinn address conference.

A group of activists in the union produced a red card with a list of pay cuts and education cuts on them.

We encouraged people to hold them up if they disagreed with anything the Minister said.

The red cards first appeared when Quinn mentioned the new proposed deal and were accompanied by heckles, booing and angry shouting when he proceeded to insult delegates in his speech – at one point he referred to his audience as his "comrades in education".

This was probably the worst reception any Minister of Education has received in a decade.

The scene was set for a stormy final 2 days. Angry scenes continued long after the Minister had left.

A huge row broke out when standing orders and the leadership attempted to block an emergency motion, seeking the INTO put in place a strategy in the event of a NO vote.

An accusation of manipulation by NO activists made by the General Secretary angered delegates and it was decided overwhelmingly to allow a motion on a strategy be discussed.

Although, the motion which eventually made it to the floor was not as strong as we would have liked – it was a major victory to force the leadership to allow the discussion take place.

In the end, the motion which called for a strategy to be developed was unanimously passed.

The INTO is key as to whether or not the LRC proposals are accepted. Conference was therefore extremely important. We hope that the sentiments and anger expressed at conference translate into a massive rejection of the proposed 'deal' and that a major fight back is mounted. The battle over Easter was just the start of a long war with the government and a bureaucracy hell bent on avoiding confrontation.

ASTI fights back in Wexford

By MARK WALSH
(member of ASTI FIGHTBACK)

TWO major themes dominated the ASTI conference in Wexford this year. The first unsurprisingly, was Croke Park 2.

Not content with two pay cuts amounting to at least 14%, followed by a major attack on teachers' conditions, Labour's Howlin decided to come back for more – even before Croke Park 1 had expired.

At the 184-member executive meeting of the ASTI in January, ASTI FIGHTBACK proposed a motion not to enter talks on Croke Park 2, arguing that to do so was simply to ask for further attacks on our pay and conditions. Unfortunately, the motion was defeated by a 70-30% majority.

However, our position has since been totally vindicated as we see what our union 'negotiators' agreed to in Croke Park 2.

At Convention, members of ASTI FIGHTBACK collected over 100 signatures from delegates in order to put forward two emergency motions.

The first sought to ensure that the vote of the wider membership in the ballot will be respected; the second sought to initiate industrial action if the Government imposed Croke Park 2.

In the end, the executive replaced our motions with one of its own, watered-down, with language that is less binding.

The new wording does leave quite a bit of 'wriggle-room' to the executive, but

members voted for it and left the executive in no doubt that they don't want any vacillation.

The second major theme was the planned introduction of the new Junior Cycle.

The process has already begun with the roll-out of the new Literacy and Numeracy 'strategy' and the innocuous-sounding 'School Self-Evaluation'. In ASTI FIGHTBACK we believe Quinn's package will pave the way for an English-style education system in Ireland.

The Junior Cycle curriculum will be narrowed to allow for an increased focus on literacy and numeracy, which will be tested in Second Year using Standardised Testing.

The results of these tests can be used as the basis for generating

league tables – and indeed the Literacy and Numeracy strategy states that the results can be used in the "targeting of under-performing schools." The whole thing comes full circle when you realise that the teachers in these "under-performing schools" may find that these results are taken into account in their performance management, the introduction of which is to be accelerated under Croke Park 2.

Bye Bye incremental progression if you don't measure up to some arbitrary standard imposed by management dictate... This cannot be tolerated and if you want to join the fight back against neoliberal education in the ASTI see facebook.com/astifightback or email astifightback@gmail.com.



Croke Park 2: A watershed for unions

By KIERAN ALLEN

THE Croke Park 2 proposals have brought the crisis facing the trade union movement to the fore.

Developments around these proposals are unprecedented and raise the question: what is the purpose of the ICTU?

Union leaders – who constantly tell members that they must stick to agreements – allowed the government to tear up Croke Park 1.

This was itself a bad agreement but the government's strategy was to take as much as they could in the early stages.

So they pushed through changes in rosters in hospitals and local authorities, for example, to reduce overtime.

Then they came back for even more – and the ICTU leaders allowed them to do this.

Labour

The main reason was the influence of the Labour Party.

Labour's support is collapsing among workers and in unions like SIPTU; there has been mass support to withdraw funding to that party.

But Labour is deeply embedded in the union hierarchy and they used their influence to get the unions to agree to another €1 billion in 'savings' from the public sector.

These moves made a mockery of the ICTU's own verbal opposition to austerity.

The second unusual feature was the degree to which SIPTU and IMPACT leaders tried to use 'divide and rule tactics' to push through the vote.

These two unions – along with allies such as the PSEU, which represents middle and higher grade civil servants – command a bare 51 percent majority in the ICTU.

They hoped to use this thin majority to vote through pay cuts and extra working hours for workers in other unions.

But to win the vote in their own unions, they also tried similar 'divide and rule' tactics.

They put the word about that low paid workers were 'looked after' in the deal.

But they failed to emphasise that such workers had to give an hour's



Minister for Public Expenditure Brendan Howlin



The TUI stated their members will not be bound by an ICTU vote

free overtime to their employers and that they were being signed up for a review of travel and subsistence allowances.

All of this raises fundamental ques-

tions about the nature of the ICTU.

ICTU

Theoretically, the ICTU is supposed to be the expression of solidarity

among workers.

Those who attack the ICTU are often accused of breaking the 'unity' of the workers movement.

But the obvious retort is: no one

joined a union to have their pay and conditions worsened by the votes of other workers. Instead of being a shield to protect workers ICTU is becoming their prison and the reality is that Congress has shown no leadership in the present crisis.

It is effectively led by one man, David Begg, who sat on the board of the Central Bank throughout the years when banks made super-profits – and never blew the whistle on the lack of regulation.

The one effective function of the ICTU is to police 'anti-poaching' rules.

This means that workers cannot transfer from one union to another. SIPTU has a particular interest in maintaining this rule as it allows them to live with disillusionment amongst their membership – knowing workers cannot move to another union.

In the aftermath of Croke Park 2, all of this is now up for grabs.

A number of unions, most notably the TUI, have stated that their members will not be bound by an ICTU vote. If these unions carry through on this, it could lead to the break-up of the ICTU.

The reality, however, is that unions who oppose the deal have no choice but to resist.

The days of just voting No and then meekly supporting an artificial majority constructed by an alliance of SIPTU and IMPACT leaders are over.

To repeat: union solidarity cannot be about worsening the conditions of other workers.

In the next few weeks, it is vital that a debate is opened up in unions like UNITE, INMO and the CPSU to promote the idea of a 'resistance alliance'.

The government has threatened these unions – and they need to stick together.

All of them should declare that they will not be bound by the terms of Croke Park 2 and carry through on the necessary actions to defend their members.

It will then be up to the ICTU leaders to show whether they think that unity with the Labour Party is more important than unity with fellow workers.

OPINION PIECE

Quinn's reforms leave much to be desired

By James Grannell (Editor of College Tribune - UCD's Independent Student Newspaper)

ON 27 March the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn, announced his commitment to reduce the number of degree programs in higher education, reduce the number of grade bands in the leaving certificate and address the "problematic predictability" in the leaving certificate exams.

While many, including the Minister, view such commitments in a positive light, the department of Education has once again failed to tackle the real issues that are destroying the Irish education system.

Education in Ireland is moving ever closer to make believe.

While the government and the HEA talk of access and streamlining, growing numbers of young people are being forced out of third level education for economic reasons.

The same Minister who now talks of access and reform recently announced crippling hikes in registration fees and cuts to grants for third level. This comes on the back of the huge financial pressure currently facing many families.

Young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are suffering disproportionately as a result of governmental policy around education. These young people do not have the



same access to private tuition or grinds schools as their peers from wealthy backgrounds. Their families cannot afford to send their children to the costly private schools, often referred to as "feeder schools" for Ireland's universities.

Educational Inequality

This in turn leads to massive inequality – something that is clearly demonstrated in the general attitude of students from differing socio-economic backgrounds.

Those who attend "good" secondary

schools – among these are counted the vast majority of Ireland's private "elite" schools – are trained to be leaders in society. Those who do not have the same opportunity receive a very different education. They are taught to obey, to hand things in on time, to accept authority and discipline. They are not filled with confidence in their own ability nor are they taught to question perceived wisdom.

They are encouraged to display and develop only those attitudes that are acceptable for workers to possess under

the capitalist system. The expectations of the system are forced into the subconscious of our young people.

Within the education system exams and tests are seen as being of the utmost importance. This invariably leads to a situation where students cram for one exam after another, regurgitating information, which is forgotten as soon as they leave the exam hall.

Over emphasis on test scores, throughout all levels of education, fosters wicked individualism within young people.

They are taught that they must achieve as individuals – that they must surpass all around them to become the best.

When students can't live up to these societal expectations their "failure" becomes internalised.

They begin to see themselves as failures; self-criticism takes over, the end of which can be seen in the increasing numbers of young people suffering from mental health problems.

Unless these class issues are addressed within the reform of the Irish education system any changes made will be little more than cosmetic.

Education must be accessible to all regardless of class or economic situation.

NEWS IN DERRY

Gasification = Incineration (Ban the Burn)

By MIKE GRAHAM

THERE are plans to build a Gasification Incinerator in Derry.

If this goes ahead, toxic waste and harmful gases will be produced that could harm the local region. But residents are fighting back.

The proposed plant is set to be built in the residential Strathfoyle area. Derry City Council says that it is 'gasification' not 'incineration', but clever rhetoric does not hide the fact that this is a glorified incinerator which produces toxic waste.

The site for the Gasification Plant has received full planning permission. This has been done without regard for the health risks involved or the opinions of local residents. But, Derry City Council still has to sign the operating license and therefore retains the final say.

If SF and the SDLP say they are against incineration and are opposing a similar build in Belfast then their approach should be the same for Derry. Previous attempts to build an incinerator in Derry were thwarted by people power – this can be done again!

Derry people have started a campaign group to stop the incinerator. They called a demonstration for Saturday 6 April to raise awareness of the immediate 'Don't Sign' campaign calling on Derry City Council not to sign the contract.

Why are tensions rising in Korea?

DAVID WHITEHOUSE explains the background to the latest escalation of the conflict

THE situation on the Korean peninsula has taken a belligerent new turn—and as usual, the mainstream media have presented a story that could have come straight out of the U.S. State Department. The simple message is: "North Korea has (once again) taken the region to the brink of war."

Demonizing the North is made easy by the character of the regime in power there. Though it still claims to be socialist, it is the complete opposite: A tyranny in which most of the population lives in poverty and dictatorial power is passed down through a single family.

But targeting North Korea has its uses for the U.S. government, now as much as at any time in the past. The U.S. military has long cooperated with South Korea to flex its muscles in the region. There are still some 28,000 U.S. troops in the South, and, in case of war, the U.S. would be in command of the South's 500,000 troops—a longstanding proviso that is set to expire in 2015. The U.S. withdrew its nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula in the early 1990s, but nuclear and other heavy munitions remain at the ready from ships, submarines and warplanes just off the coast.

The Pivot to Asia

All of that is business as usual. But in the past year, there are many signs that something new is going on.

The U.S. and South Korea have started taking steps to fight an offensive war that would occupy the North. According to Christine Hong and Hyun Lee, in March of last year "U.S.-South Korean forces carried out the largest amphibious landing operation exercise in 20 years, involving 13 naval vessels, 52 amphibious armoured vehicles, 40 fighter jets and 9,000 U.S. troops."

To cross the Demilitarized Zone, the U.S. has also brought in mine-resistant vehicles originally constructed for action in Iraq and Afghanistan. The redeployment shows the real meaning of the U.S. "pivot to Asia"—as Barack Obama winds down past wars in the Middle East to prepare for new ones.

Last year, Japan also agreed to host a second U.S.-designed missile defense radar, while South Korea is constructing a naval base on the island of Jeju that can accommodate Aegis destroyers, a key component of missile defense. The benign-sounding project of missile defense would actually enable offensive operations by neutralizing North Korea's missile deterrent.

Whether or not Obama and South Korean President Park Geun-hye actually plan to overthrow the regime of Kim Jong-un, they're taking concrete steps to get ready for regime change. Kim's responses show that he's preparing for the worst.

That would explain why he made the threat of pre-emptive nuclear strikes. North Korea's nuclear program may have begun decades ago as a bargaining chip to win aid and a security guarantee from the U.S., but it now seems clear that Kim is treating the program as a deterrent force against U.S.-led aggression.

The Axis of Evil

The last time this happened was when George W. Bush declared



North Korea to be a part of an "Axis of Evil" in 2002. In the ensuing build-up for the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Kim Jong-un's father, Kim Jong-il, saw the writing on the wall: Bush felt free to attack Iraq because Saddam Hussein hadn't developed an effective military deterrent, so the elder Kim resolved to hurry up and get one. North Korea detonated its first nuclear device in 2006.

The U.S. conflict with North Korea went from a hot point in 2002-03 to a slow simmer as the U.S. got bogged down in the Iraq and Afghan wars. But Obama's pivot to Asia has quietly reiterated the threats that Bush had made so loudly.

Nevertheless, Obama and hawks within South Korea are constrained by public opinion. Two-thirds of the population favours humanitarian aid to North Korea "regardless of the political situation," and more than half favour direct talks with the North. In other countries, a politician might try to win popularity by ratcheting up war rhetoric, but in the Korean context, such a tactic might have

the opposite effect.

Park and Obama may be preparing for war, but their first obstacle would be South Korean resistance, not North Korean arms.

Moreover, at least for now, China still has uses for North Korea. It serves as a land buffer against U.S. and South Korean military forces, and China has sought to develop the North as a low-wage "eastern province."

Chinese officials may oppose North Korea's nuclear development, but that doesn't mean they think Kim is crazy—or that they're taking sides against him.

They recognize that Kim's regime has built its bombs and missiles in response to U.S. provocations.

As always, the situation in Korea is complex because it involves more than Koreans. For centuries, bigger powers have tried to influence events on the peninsula from the outside. One thing is clear, however: The current crisis is made in the USA.

Egyptian activists released after police station ordeal

by JUDITH ORR

EGYPTIAN activists were arrested and beaten before being freed after demonstrating at the arrest of protesters on Saturday March 30.

Police in the city of Alexandria beat the group of 13 activists, who included lawyers, in El-Raml police station.

The group had gone to the police station to represent protesters brought there by members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Brotherhood members were demanding the protesters be arrested after a demonstration outside their office in Sidi Gaber.

Demonstrations have taken place at Brotherhood offices across Egypt against president Mohamed Mursi.

Station

One of those arrested in the police station was lawyer Mahienair El-Massry, a member of the Revolutionary Socialist (RS) group. She spoke to Socialist Worker after her release.

"People—including a journalist, a member of the bus workers' union and several lawyers—went to the station to call for the release of the prisoners.

"When they arrived officers insulted the lawyers and began to beat



them all with sticks inside the station.

"When I got there we decided to stage a sit-in to demand an official apology for our treatment."

News spread in Alexandria that people were being beaten in the police station and a crowd of 200 gathered outside.

They shouted slogans, accusing the police of corruption.

"Inside we could hear them and we joined in the chanting against the police," continued Mahie.

"The police were so worried even the head of security of Alexandria

came to the station. The police started beating people in the protest outside too. I tried to get them to stop so they beat me and arrested me."

Outside police dragged protesters along the street.

Police officers stripped the clothes from RS member Raniwa Youssef and sexually assaulted her. Her husband Youssef Chaaban was one of those arrested.

"The police even accused us of beating up security police even though we were the victims," said Mahie. Many were badly injured."

The 13 were accused of damaging a police station, insulting the station's personnel, attempting to help prisoners escape and spreading terror among citizens.

Mahie insisted that no one put up bail for her as her freedom should not be bought.

"I and another comrade refused to answer questions saying we didn't recognise the legitimacy of the prosecutor," she said.

All those arrested, including those who had refused to cooperate, were released and acquitted late on Saturday.

Pressure

"I couldn't believe we got out in one day," Mahie said. "It was the pressure from outside that did it."

The local police were so angry at the release of the 13 that they went on strike in protest. "We won't be intimidated and this has only made the revolution stronger," said Mahie.

"There are still others imprisoned we have to fight for."

"We need to win the release of our comrade, Hassan Mostafa. He was sentenced to two years in prison on 12 March for attacking a prosecutor."

"People believe in themselves. We feel we have the upper hand."

"We are not afraid. We will continue to fight."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Move to false 'unity' in Italy

by SIÂN RUDDICK

POLITICAL parties in Italy face mounting pressure to form a "unity" government and end the impasse that has gripped the country since February's inconclusive elections.

President Giorgio Napolitano has assembled a group of ten men to form the basis of a future cabinet. This could establish a second technocratic government to replace that of Mario Monti, imposed in 2011.

The group includes unelected technocrats like Salvatore Rossi, deputy head of the Bank of Italy, and statistics agency head Professor Enrico Giovannini, alongside some elected representatives.

Napolitano has called on it to provide "much needed stability" to the country.

Monti remains caretaker prime minister, but political decisions have ground to a halt.

Voters showed how sick they are of the old political elite when almost a third voted for the populist 5 Star Movement led by comedian Beppe Grillo.

Cyprus 'bail in' shows austerity has failed

by PANOS GARGANAS



THE crisis in Cyprus has pushed the Eurozone back into crisis. The mainstream media claims that what is at stake is reform of an island economy that relies on 'money laundering for the Russian oligarchs'.

Apparently it's legitimate if Russian tycoons invest millions in London's housing market or football clubs. If, however, they send funds to Cypriot banks, that is a "casino economy".

In reality, events in Cyprus expose the failure of austerity to stop the crisis.

If the so-called bailouts in Greece, Portugal and Ireland had been successful, bailing out Cyprus would be a piece of cake. Cyprus needs roughly one tenth of the second Greek bailout.

But bailouts have failed. Greece is in its sixth year of recession and Portugal has just been given an extra year to achieve the targets set by the Troika.

This is the real reason that a new approach has been taken in Cyprus—a "bail in".

So far, rescuing banks has meant imposing cuts on wages, pensions and welfare services to fund the rescue plans. Now the cuts are being extended to bank deposits—people's savings.

No wonder people took to the streets in Nicosia against the plan.

Right-wing president Nicos Anastasiades was elected president of Cyprus last month. The governments in Berlin and Paris obviously thought he could impose the deal on a working class demoralised by the electoral defeat of the left.

They were wrong. Workers in Cyprus, as in so many other places, are angry and radicalised.

The image that perhaps best sums



up this spirit is a picture of a middle aged couple joining the demonstration outside parliament in Nicosia. Their placards read, "NO" to the eurozone deal and "It is capitalism, stupid".

Pressure

This pressure from below forced the Greek Cypriot parliament to reject the "rescue deal", but the established left is hesitating.

AKEL, the Communist Party, ruled Cyprus until a month ago. It participated in the "Council of Party Political Leaders" that is working with the president in a spirit of national unity. Its leaders claim the protests in the streets support the negotiating position of the country's president!

Meanwhile the Greek government is scared stiff of "contagion". Not just of economic contagion, although banks and businesses in Greece are heavily

involved in Cyprus. The main fear is that the spirit of revolt will reignite in Greece.

Having secured a deal in Cyprus the Troika will return to Athens early this month, demanding mass sackings in the civil service and prolongation of the levy on households.

Prime Minister Antonis Samaras is in no position to impose these measures at the moment. However, the radical left Syriza coalition is aligning with AKEL and is seeking allies way to its right.

Alexis Tsipras, leader of Syriza, recently met with Panos Kamenos, leader of the "Independent Greeks", a breakaway party from the Greek Tories. They agreed to work together.

The Independent Greeks is the only party in parliament that has broken the isolation of the Neo-Nazi Golden Dawn when they put forward a joint

proposal against financial scandals. It will be a real pity if the opportunities opened by the proud resistance of

workers in Cyprus are wasted.

Panos Garganas is editor of Workers Solidarity, Socialist Worker's sister paper in Greece.

KEY BACKGROUND FACTS IN THE CYPRIOT 'BAILOUT'

- Cyprus has a population of 863,000 people
- Banking is massively important in the country's economy
- It accounts for around 14% of the employment and almost 9 times the total productivity in a single year (Gross Domestic Product)
- Cypriot Banks are some of the most neoliberal in the world
- The write down of Greece State debt pushed numerous private banks in Cyprus into trouble
- The Cypriot bailout is €10 billion or around 55% of the economy's GDP
- The country's second biggest bank LAIKI is to be turned into a bad bank and its best assets moved to the Bank of Cyprus.
- As usual austerity will accompany the 'bailout' as ordinary people are made to pay for the reckless decisions of the financial elite

Bank workers in Cyprus face the loss of half their pensions

by DAVE SEWELL

MORE than 5,000 bank workers in southern Cyprus were set to strike on Thursday 11 April before leading a mass protest to parliament while it decides the future of their pensions.

Cyprus' two biggest banks are being restructured into one as part of a eurozone bailout deal.

Large deposits—including workers' pension funds—will be subjected to a "haircut" of between 37.5 percent and 60 percent.

"No-one knows what's going to happen to them," one worker at the Bank of Cyprus told Socialist Worker.

"They want to downsize the bank substantially, so we'll be facing layoffs and wage cuts. And pensions are a huge concern, we could end up retiring with less than half of what we paid in."

"These are the ordinary bank workers who are going to suffer."

The bailout deal also calls for major privatisations. And the bank restructuring is taking its toll across Southern Cyprus.

"Bankruptcies have already started as finance goes out of the market," said the worker. "We expect to see the unemployment rate at least double before the end of the year, and many of us fear it could be much worse."

Southern Cyprus is the fifth Eurozone country to get a bailout after Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Spain—and many analysts think Slovenia could soon be next.

Slovenia is another small country, with a population of 2 million, and an economy in recession. Meanwhile its banks are in crisis over debt and face restructuring.

And its borrowing costs shot up last week in response to the Cyprus crisis.

Slovenia's government believes it can ride the crisis out. But the collapse of Cypriot banks has come as a sharp warning that the euro is still very much in the danger zone.

"Workers in Cyprus will fight," said the worker. "Our union has called a strike on Thursday. While parliament votes on whether our pension funds are to be saved and on what terms, we'll have 7,000 or 8,000 people outside protesting."

"But our future depends on the prospects of workers across Europe. We need to link our struggle with workers in Ireland, Greece, Spain and Portugal—and even Germany and Britain."

"We're making an appeal of solidarity to the workers of Europe, to join forces and fight back."

Thousands march against Greek anti-migrant law



Thousands of people marched in Athens, Greece, on Saturday 30 March, against a proposed new law to prevent the children of migrants from gaining Greek citizenship (Pic: Workers Solidarity)

Socialist Worker

Resistance to the Bedroom Tax is rising...

Defend Public Housing!

BRINGING in the "Bedroom tax" will cost more than it will save, according to the Chartered Institute for Housing (CIH) and the NI Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA).

The "Bedroom Tax" was introduced in Britain on 1 April, to mass protests on the streets (see box).

Stormont hasn't yet decided whether to follow suit. But politicians, many of whom grew up in social housing and whose own parents could be affected, know that if they bring it in, there will be resistance.

In Britain, more than 600,000 people will lose money for having "too many" bedrooms.

Many will fall into rent arrears and face eviction. In the North, 32,650 families will be affected and could lose between £35 and £80 a month.

The Tories want to punish people for "under-occupancy" - having a spare room.

At the same time, Posh Boy George Osborne opposes a mansion tax for the rich. It's one law for the Tories and their friends, another for everyone else.

Figures from the CIH and NIFHA show that while cutting people's Housing Benefit could mean savings of £17 million a year, it would cost £21 million per annum to manage the scheme because of added costs for collecting rents, managing tenancies and adapting the current system - and that's without the extra costs of keeping people who've been evicted in temporary accommodation etc.

Housing executive

Meanwhile, Stormont is trying to scrap the Housing Executive. The plan is to replace it with five new housing associations. This is privatisation by any other name. It will mean higher rents, fewer rights and more evictions.

Minister Nelson McCausland says this is necessary so new houses can be built and older ones refurbished since housing associations can borrow using their housing stock as collateral.

But the Housing Executive used to be able to do this and could again if it were allowed to.

Moreover, because it's a public body, we could be sure people's houses wouldn't be gambled away by empire builders that go bust, as has happened with some housing associations in Britain.

The Housing Executive is the biggest public housing landlord in these islands. It was set up in 1971 in response to discrimination against Catholics in housing allocation.

This was a key achievement of the



Round up of protests against the bedroom tax

■ Around 700 people turned out in London, chanting "can't pay, won't pay, axe the bedroom tax" as they marched down Whitehall. People hung "the shirts off their backs" on the railings opposite Downing Street.

■ There were a similar number in Liverpool, where feeder marches from the north and south of the city merged in front of St George's hall.

■ There were more than 60 demonstrations around Britain. Some 300 people marched in Cardiff and another 150 in Swansea. There were around 1,000 protesters in Edinburgh.

■ Manchester's march was smaller than on the previous day of action as a section of the Labour Party stayed away. But Labour councillors who did turn up pledged to put a motion to the council calling for no evictions.

■ And it wasn't just the big cities. Dozens of people turned up in Barnsley after a meeting on its Athersley estate. "One woman's daughter set up a bed in the high street," said George Arthur. "Passers-by queued up to sign a petition calling on the council to guarantee it will not evict anyone who can't pay, and to support council workers who refuse to issue eviction notices."

■ And some 50 people came to a protest in Wolverhampton.

■ Around Britain more protests have been called throughout the month of April.

civil rights movement. Against this background, the failure of Minister McCausland to explain how houses will be allocated if privatisation goes ahead is a cause for concern.

But privatisation is not inevitable. Many housing stock transfers have been stopped in Britain.

In 2002, 70,000 council tenants in Birmingham voted to stay with the public sector. So did tenants in Edinburgh in 2005. In the past year, tenants in Caerphilly and Flintshire in Wales have voted against stock transfer.

We can defeat privatisation here,

too.

Welfare is a right. Public housing is a necessity. The Hands Off Our Homes campaign is trying to link trade unions, workers and tenants to fight together against the bedroom tax and to keep public housing in the public sector.

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**Campaign
against Derry
Incinerator**

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**Alliance for
Choice take a
stand**